

Organized religion loses ground

The Trends Ministry Team recently reported to the Board of Trustees some important and timely information from the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life 2008. They surveyed 35,000 adults in the U.S. to determine how they see their relationship with organized religion. This is in light of the facts that mainline Protestant churches are in decline, non-denominational churches are gaining, and the ranks of unaffiliated individuals are growing. A deeper look behind those trends:

- The U.S. is 78% Christian, with a declining number of Protestants at 51%.
- 25% of American adults have left the faith of their childhood. 44% moved from one Protestant denomination to another.
- 25% of adults aged 18-29 claim no religious affiliation. 12% describe their religion as “nothing in particular.” 50% say faith is at least somewhat important to them.
- 33% of Americans were raised Catholic. 25% say they’re Catholic today. Stability of the group is due to immigrant Catholics, mostly Hispanic. Nearly half of Catholics under 30 are Hispanic.
- Most converts to evangelical churches were raised Protestant. (Pentecostal groups make up 4.4% of the U.S. population, up from 3.9% raised as Pentecostal.)
- Hindus have highest retention of childhood members—84%. Only .4% of U.S. population consider themselves Hindu.
- Jehovah’s Witnesses are one of the fastest growing groups, but have the worst retention rate—only 37% remain members.
- .4% of the U.S. population consider themselves Muslim, .7% Buddhist and 1.7% Jewish.

The bottom line is that this survey tends to counter the idea of greater commitment and structure leading to greater growth. “Right now, there is a dropping confidence in organized religion, especially in the traditional religious forms,” according to the Pew report. Organized religion is losing people, “nondenominational” religions gained 3%, the unaffiliated rose from 7.3% to 16.1% of the population. We live in a culture of change where loyalty and commitment to a religion or denomination are losing ground to the search for “what feeds me,” and/or experiencing a connection with Spirit. If people don’t find what they are looking for, they stop looking and give up on religion altogether. Take time to discuss the implications of this report with the leadership of your ministry.

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